



IDENTIFYING GENERIC SKILLS THROUGH CURRICULUM MAPPING: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

This article describes processes involved in a curriculum mapping exercise that constituted the first phase of a project aimed at furthering the integration of generic skills in a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) program. The purpose of the mapping exercise was to identify the generic skills currently fostered in the program, and those that appear to be overlooked. The article draws attention to the complexity of issues associated with curriculum mapping and highlights the need to refine the somewhat simplistic curriculum mapping techniques advocated in much of the existing literature. The centrality of collegial dialogue to curriculum mapping if it is to lead to curriculum change is also emphasised.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely acknowledged that, in a context of rapid socio-cultural, political, economic and technological change, higher education institutions have a responsibility to endeavour to prepare graduates who are able to manage and respond effectively to change and its inherent demands, challenges and tensions (Candy, Crebert, & O'Leary, 1994; De La Harpe, Radloff & Wyber, 2000; Stephenson & Yorke, 1998; UNESCO, 1996). Recognition of this responsibility has prompted considerable debate within educational, employer and political spheres about the skills and attributes expected of graduates, and how these might be fostered. Reflected in these debates are disparate philosophical perspectives and discursive positionings. These, in turn, have generated a confusion of terms (e.g., *transferable / key / core / generic / life-long learning skills; personal / graduate attributes; competencies, and capabilities*) that are often ill-received, poorly defined, and frequently, but not always, used interchangeably (Clanchy & Ballard, 1995). Case studies illustrating practical applications for higher education curricula (e.g., Fallows & Steven, 2000a) and "how to" guides advocating implementation strategies (e.g., Gibbs, Rust, Jenkins & Jaques, 1994) have followed.

In this article, we describe how academic staff of the Institute of Early Childhood, a department of Macquarie University, began to engage in and make sense of these debates, terminologies, and possibilities for practice following the award of a University teaching grant to further the integration of generic skills within the curriculum. More specifically, we focus on issues that arose during a curriculum mapping exercise that constituted the first phase of the project. In particular, we highlight the importance of collegiality and meaning-making to curriculum change and the need for the refinement of curriculum mapping techniques. We argue that these are amongst the issues that must be addressed more comprehensively than at present in the literature if the pedagogical possibilities of the current focus on generic skills and attributes are to be realised.

THE NEED TO PROBLEMATISE

Indeed, much of the existing literature about generic skills seems characterised by a schism between conceptual critiques (see, for example, Clanchy & Ballard, 1995; Holmes, 2000; Whiston, 1998; Wolf, 1991) and, for the most part, unproblematized accounts of initiatives and programs that have sought to foster these skills and qualities. The critiques focus on the "pervasive vagueness and inconsistency" (Clanchy & Ballard, 1995, p. 155) in the use of the terminology and the conceptual confusion that has followed; the lack of methodological or conceptual rigour in the development of the multitude of lists of skills and attitudes; the lack of attention to the context in which skills are developed, and the paucity of evidence to suggest that they are, in fact, transferable across contexts; and the political and managerialist agendas that drive many of the generic skills developments without providing

resources to support and sustain significant pedagogical and curriculum change. With some noticeable exceptions (e.g., De La Harpe et al, 2000; De La Harpe & Radloff, 2000; Jenkins, 2000), it appears that accounts of initiatives aimed at incorporating a focus on generic skills in higher education, and "how to" guides offering suggestions for practice rarely engage with these critiques. This lack of engagement, it seems to us, limits informed exploration of the pedagogical possibilities of focusing on generic skills within higher education curricula.

We hold the view that the dissemination of frank and reflective accounts that do not shy away from issues raised in critiques or from difficulties encountered in practice can lead to productive conversations and a rethinking of assumptions and practices. One such account is offered by De La Harpe et al (2000) who describe the difficulties they encountered when attempting to integrate a focus on generic skills into a Bachelor of Commerce program. Amongst the problems reported were staff resentment about a "top-down" approach and the time demands involved; lack of commitment by some staff; feelings of inadequacy amongst some staff concerning their ability to teach generic skills; and little enthusiasm for engaging in professional development activities to overcome this general lack of confidence. Clearly, institutional cultures and context-specific issues will vary. We believe, however, that an airing of issues and difficulties, and attempts to grapple with these, will ultimately be more fruitful for those interested in exploring ways to foster generic skills within higher education curricula than unproblematised reports of successes.

THE CONTEXT

The focus of this article is the Institute of Early Childhood's BEd (early childhood) program that prepares graduates to teach young children aged from six weeks to eight years in childcare centres, preschools and the early years of school. Approximately 600 students (approximately 2/3 of whom are school leavers; the remainder mature age) are enrolled in the program, which is offered in internal and distance education modes. The majority of the 35 units (semester-long subjects) offered as part of the program are prescribed, although students choose from a range of elective early childhood units in their fourth and final year.

Following its incorporation into Macquarie University in 1990 as part of the dismantling of Australia's binary higher education system, the Institute rapidly developed a presence within the University as an early adopter of teaching innovations, particularly those related to information technology. Many of the Institute's 22 academic staff have been awarded University teaching grants. In keeping with the Institute's tradition of staff collegiality and collaboration, in-principle support for the project reported in this article was obtained from our colleagues before submitting the proposal to the University's Generic Skills fund. As we go on to discuss, securing this 'grass roots' support was an important initial step in establishing a sense of ownership of and commitment to the project that was to prove crucial to its success. It also helped enormously that we enjoyed our colleagues' respect and trust.

THE PROJECT AND ITS CONCEPTUAL UNDERPINNINGS

The proposal submitted to the Generic Skills funding committee outlined three main objectives:

- i. To map the BEd (early childhood) curriculum to identify the generic skills currently fostered in the program; the stages of the program at which they are fostered; how they are fostered; and gaps in the curriculum;
- ii. To revise unit outlines, curriculum content and assignment tasks to reflect and make explicit the valuing of generic skills within the program; and
- iii. To develop a generic skills self-evaluation document for student use.

Like all grant holders funded under the Macquarie University Generic Skills scheme, we were asked to be cognisant of, but not be limited by, the University's definition of generic skills $\frac{3}{4}$ "those skills, abilities, and personal attributes that can be used within the wide range of working environments that graduates operate in throughout their lives" (Fraser, 2001, p.1). According to Macquarie University documentation, these include:

- foundation skills of literacy, numeracy and information technology;
- self-awareness and interpersonal skills, including the capacity for self-management, collaboration and leadership;
- communication skills for effective presentation and cultural understanding;
- critical analysis skills to evaluate, synthesise and judge;
- problem-solving skills to apply and adopt knowledge to the real world; and
- creative skills to imagine, invent and discover.

(Macquarie University, 2001).

We extended this conceptualisation in two ways.

First, we embedded the University's definition of generic skills within Stephenson's (1998) notion of capability. According to Stephenson, capability is "the integration of knowledge, skills, personal qualities and understanding *used appropriately and effectively* $\frac{3}{4}$ not just in familiar and highly focused specialist contexts but in response *tonew and challenging* circumstances" (p. 2, italics in original). Stephenson contrasts capability to competence. The latter, he argues, is "primarily about the ability to perform effectively" in familiar contexts when faced with familiar problems (p.3). Capability embraces but extends beyond competence; it involves an ability and a willingness to apply understandings, knowledge and skills to unfamiliar contexts and unfamiliar problems.

As Stephenson points out, the ability to act effectively and appropriately in "unfamiliar and changing circumstances" requires more than skills and knowledge; it also requires "ethics, judgments, the self-confidence to take risks and a commitment to learn from the experience" (p.3). Capability, therefore, involves an ability to move beyond one's specialist domain, and a justifiable confidence in one's ability to contribute more broadly. For this reason, we added two additional categories to the University's list of generic skills; one labelled ethics, and the other, a collection of personal attributes such as willingness to take substantial responsibility for one's learning and to seek new knowledge. We brought these conceptual understandings to the curriculum mapping task that constituted the first phase of the project.

GETTING STARTED

Curriculum mapping is an exercise that is widely advocated in the generic skills literature. Essentially, it involves identifying how the existing curriculum fosters the development of generic skills and qualities, as well as gaps where opportunities to develop these skills and qualities appear to be overlooked (Fallows & Steven, 2000b). Although some examples of final products of curriculum mapping are outlined in the generic skills literature (see, for example, O'Brien, 2000), we found surprisingly little guidance concerning the practicalities of the processes involved.

After considering several alternatives, we eventually adopted a process suggested by Gibbs, Rust, Jenkins and Jaques (1994). Their TDMA course review checklist is based on the premise that four elements are needed for the effective development of skills: training, demand (that is, the requirement to practise), monitoring and assessment. These terms, to us, seemed somewhat technical and mechanistic, and not particularly well suited to the

more constructivist and humanistic ethos that, for the most part, underpins teaching practices at the Institute. Nevertheless, identifying which generic skills were taught, practiced and / or evaluated within a unit seemed to us a useful approach to curriculum mapping. This process also seemed manageable given our resource constraints and our desire to map the 35 units comprising the BEd (early childhood) program. Haigh and Kilmartin's (1999) success in using a similar process to identify students' and staff perceptions of the generic skills focused on in a geography program also influenced our decision.

We converted the Gibbs et al (1994) checklist into a matrix that we referred to as the Student Learning Profile (SLP). One axis contained 13 skills / attributes drawn from the Macquarie University generic skills list: literacy, numeracy, information technology, self-awareness / interpersonal, communication, cultural understanding, critical analysis, problem solving, creativity, organisational skills, leadership, with the addition of ethics and other personal attributes such as willingness to take responsibility for one's learning. The other axis contained the following indicators:

- Assumed [students are assumed to have acquired this skill prior to the unit];
- Encouraged [students are encouraged to gain / practice / refine this skill in this unit];
- Modelled [for students in this unit];
- Explicitly taught [to students in this unit];
- Required [students are required to demonstrate this skill in this unit]; and
- Evaluated [students are evaluated on this skill in this unit].

Our intention was that unit coordinators would indicate on the Student Learning Profile the generic skills and qualities fostered in their respective units, and the extent to, or means by which, this was done.

We piloted the Student Learning Profile with a handful of colleagues. Following their feedback, we added to the SLP:

- i. two to three descriptors (drawn from the generic skills literature) for each skill / quality, and space for staff to add additional descriptors;
- ii. a column for staff to indicate whether they thought that particular generic skill was relevant to that unit; and
- iii. an additional column for general comments

The revised SLP fitted on to a double-sided A3 size page [See Figure 1]. We then distributed copies to all unit coordinators (that is, almost all academic staff), and asked them to complete an SLP for each of the units for which they were responsible. Some unit coordinators sought input from the other members of their teaching team; others completed it individually.

KEEPING STAFF "ON-SIDE"

Despite our colleagues' in-principle support for the project, we were aware that to avoid difficulties of the kind reported by De La Harpe et al (2000), we needed to reassure staff that the curriculum mapping process would be neither a threatening exercise or an administrative burden. We recognised that the success of the project would depend on our ability to engage our colleagues in its possibilities and to generate enthusiasm and commitment. It was essential, therefore, to avoid giving them the erroneous impression that our intention was to evaluate their unit(s). Rather, we took the stance of interested colleagues who would

like to learn more about the units comprising the BEd (early childhood) program in order to identify patterns in the fostering of generic skills and qualities across the program. Being able to draw on the reserves of trust and respect that underpinned our relationships with our colleagues was invaluable, especially during these early phases of the project.

After unit coordinators had completed an SLP for their respective unit(s), we arranged an individual consultation with each coordinator to discuss their completed form. Prior to each consultation, we read the unit outline(s) and highlighted on our copy aspects that seemed to us to reflect a focus on generic skills and qualities. We decided against completing an SLP for each unit, ourselves, based on our interpretation of the unit outline, as we felt we had insufficient knowledge to do so in a meaningful way. Moreover, as previously mentioned, we were anxious to avoid seeming judgmental.

CONSULTATIONS WITH STAFF

Consultations with unit coordinators were approximately one hour in duration. Where coordinators had responsibility for more than one unit, these times were generally extended, or additional consultation times arranged. Our approach was to invite unit coordinators to lead us through their completed SLP. For the most part, staff had ticked what they considered to be the relevant cells on the SLP. Many staff had also written additional descriptors in some of the generic skills / qualities categories, and several gave examples of specific teaching practices or assignments that they considered fostered generic skills and qualities. We asked unit coordinators to explain their thinking behind their placement of ticks, and where necessary sought clarification about the additional descriptors and examples they had included. We also asked any questions that had surfaced for us when reading the unit outlines. As issues were explored, we encouraged staff to amend their original ticks, descriptors, or examples, as they saw a need. In many cases, our discussions prompted staff to add ticks as they recognised previously overlooked ways in which their units fostered generic skills and qualities. Because we did not want to appear judgmental, we did relatively little to challenge instances where ticks seemed to us possibly unwarranted.

At the beginning of each consultation, we requested our colleagues' permission to use a consultation pro-forma. The pro-forma consisted of six sections that enabled us to note:

- i. issues arising during the discussion;
- ii. categories or descriptors that were added or amended;
- iii. the unit coordinator's comments about the distribution of ticks on the Student Learning Profile;
- iv. specific examples given;
- v. the unit coordinator's thoughts about whether the exercise had enabled anything to surface about the unit;
- vi. the unit coordinator's perceptions of the adequacy of the terminology we had used, and suggestions for possible alternate wording; and
- vii. other thoughts or comments.

Following each consultation, we returned a summary of our notes to our colleagues for verification and / or amendment. Staff commented positively on the processes we used. They appreciated our familiarity with their unit outline(s); our non-judgmental approach; and the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their unit(s). As well, they found the consultation notes a useful record of the key points arising during our conversation.

METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS

Although we were gratified and encouraged by our colleagues' positive responses, the limitations of our methodology became evident when we attempted to analyse the completed SLPs. We had intended to undertake a quantitative analysis of the placement of the ticks. It soon became apparent, however, that these were not a reliable indicator of whether and/or how generic skills and qualities were promoted within each of the 35 units included in the mapping exercise. We identified several reasons for this lack of reliability.

First, the positioning of ticks was influenced by differences in staff interpretations of the descriptors we had provided for each generic skill or quality. To some staff, the descriptors lacked clarity, thus making it difficult for them to envisage what a particular generic skill or quality might look like within the context of their unit(s). Interpretations of the descriptors also seemed influenced by disciplinary background. Given the diversity in interpretations, and to overcome difficulties associated with lack of clarity of descriptors, we encouraged staff to refine the wording of these descriptors or to add new descriptors to their copy of the SLP, as they saw fit. This meant, however, that during the consultation phase of the project, staff did not have the opportunity to consider, or tick, the descriptors added by their colleagues.

As second complicating factor was that the placement of the ticks reflected differing philosophical perspectives amongst staff. Some staff, for example, placed considerable emphasis on 'encouraging', and 'modelling' particular qualities such as a commitment to reflective practices, or an understanding and appreciation of diversity, but considered it inappropriate or impossible to 'require' or 'evaluate' these. In contrast, other staff seemed to take the unproblematic view that any skill or quality that they considered they 'explicitly taught' could be readily evaluated. These different orientations to teaching markedly influenced the placement of ticks.

A related issue involved differences in the reflexivity with which individual staff appeared to approach the task. Some staff agonised over the placement of ticks. *Cultural understanding is almost a life philosophy. Can you teach that?*, asked one person, while another colleague wondered, *How would we really know about a student's capacity to relate to others in non-discriminatory ways?* On the other hand, some staff seemed to tick routinely with seemingly little justification of their decisions. In these cases, our reluctance to do more than gently challenge seemingly unwarranted ticks further contributed to the unreliability of the ticks.

Another issue affecting reliability involved the questionable assumptions underlying the ticks. Some of our colleagues were concerned that the ticks did not acknowledge that the development of these skills and qualities is an ongoing process throughout the program. As one person asked, *How meaningful are the ticks when expectations at 200 [2nd year] level may be more sophisticated than what is expected at a 100 [1st year] level?* Moreover, as several staff pointed out, the opportunity for students within a particular unit to develop specific generic skills or qualities can vary according to assignment options chosen by students or the nature of a field placement that might be associated with the unit.

For these reasons, therefore, we decided that our analysis of the completed SLPs needed to be "broad brush" and descriptive of general trends, rather than a quantitative tallying of ticks. Initially, we were disappointed that a quantitative analysis would not be possible. We were also somewhat surprised that Gibbs et al (1994) had not foreshadowed these methodological limitations when promoting their TDMA review checklist. Had we been aware of these limitations, we may have approached the curriculum mapping process differently. Given that the difficulties we encountered seem unlikely to be specific to our particular context, we feel a duty to alert others who might be contemplating adopting a similar process.

BENEFITS OF THE CURRICULUM MAPPING PROCESS

Overall, however, despite the limitations described above, the curriculum mapping exercise seemed to us worthwhile. It enabled us to identify some general patterns within the program in relation to the promotion of generic skills, and in that sense we achieved some of the aims of the curriculum mapping exercise. Perhaps more importantly, most staff commented that it provided a valuable opportunity for reflection on their unit and assisted them to identify directions to pursue in their teaching and changes they might make to their unit outlines. They also reported that the curriculum mapping process raised issues about teaching and evaluating generic skills that they wanted to discuss as a whole staff. Finally, some staff perceived that engagement in curriculum mapping offered key strategic advantages. Each of these benefits is discussed briefly below.

General patterns within the program

A number of patterns emerged within the program in relation to generic skills. It became clear, for example, that there was a strong emphasis throughout the program on fostering literacy and cultural understanding. Numeracy, on the other hand, was, for the most part, overlooked, and indeed, seen by most staff as "not relevant", perhaps in retrospect, because of the narrowness of the descriptors we had used. As might be expected of 100 and 200 level units fewer generic skills and qualities were assumed of students on entry, than in 300 and 400 level units. In particular, by 300 and 400 level, students were assumed to have acquired adequate literacy and IT skills. Not surprisingly, the focus on specific skills varied from unit to unit. Some units, for example, emphasised team work; others, critical analysis. Across the program, however, there was an emphasis on applying generic skills and qualities to practical contexts, and the practicum component of the program was seen as particularly important in this respect. At all levels of the program, staff teaching generally perceived that they engaged more in 'indirect' teaching of generic skills and qualities (by 'encouraging' and 'modelling') than in 'explicit teaching'. For the most part, there was also more emphasis on providing opportunities to engage in learning processes that fostered generic skills (for example, through non-assessed tutorial tasks and discussions) than on evaluating these skills and qualities.

Opportunity for reflection

An overwhelming majority of our colleagues commented that they valued the opportunity for reflection offered by the curriculum mapping exercise. Many found this reaffirming. As one person commented, *I wasn't aware of how many of generic skills are coming through. Not necessarily explicitly, but through modelling. I felt encouraged, it made me feel like we're doing a pretty good job.* Interestingly, many staff found the consultation process assisted them to articulate previously tacit understandings about aspects of their teaching. One colleague reported, for example, that it enabled her *to clarify why we are doing what we are doing; to unpack what each assignment draws out; and to realise how many generic skills group work involves.* There was a general feeling amongst our colleagues that we could be more explicit, both in our teaching of generic skills, and in alerting students through our unit outlines to the opportunities provided in the unit to develop generic skills and qualities. As one person put it, *It's interesting to look at what you think you do - but then see the gaps (between the implicit and the explicit).*

Most staff outlined several changes they intended to make in their teaching and in their unit outlines, as a consequence of their reflection. Again, the theme of needing to be more explicit surfaced. One colleague summed up the views of many when she commented,

We think that we are modelling, but that doesn't mean that the students recognise that this is what we are doing ... we could be more explicit about what we are modelling... This would make it a more powerful learning experience for students.

Another colleague described a strategy that would enable her to be more explicit.

It came to me as I was doing this exercise that I could ask students what they think they will learn from tutorial tasks and that I could list the points they raise on an OHT. I think this would lead to an interesting discussion.

Proposed changes to unit outlines included adding a new section that provided an overview of the generic skills and attitudes to be fostered in the unit, and including objectives and criteria for assignments that referred specifically to generic skills. Other staff reported that they intended to incorporate a focus on a particular generic skill or quality that they had not previously considered particularly relevant to the unit. Creativity, leadership, communication and ethics were all mentioned in this regard. One colleague expressed interest in exploring the possibilities of students developing a learning portfolio to document their developing skills and qualities.

Issues identified by staff for further discussion

Apart from proposed changes to teaching strategies and individual units, staff indicated that the curriculum mapping process had enabled them to identify issues that they considered warranted discussion amongst staff as a group. These included:

- How to avoid underestimating students, while acknowledging that some students have little prior experience in developing some generic skills and qualities? As one person commented:

It's important to acknowledge what students bring to the course, and to avoid adopting an 'empty vessel' perspective. At the same time, some students will be just at the beginning stages of developing these skills / capabilities. So how much to assume is a difficult question.

- How to cater for the diversity amongst students in terms of their developing generic skills and qualities? One person explained, *We do a lot of explicit teaching on a 1:1 basis - because aspects that apply to some students won't necessarily apply to all students.* Given resource constraints, recognising and responding to these differences poses formidable challenges.
- How can we evaluate qualities such as cultural understanding? In the words of one colleague, *Students can know and give the 'right' response but how do you assess what people do, as opposed to what they say?*
- To what extent do we acknowledge that many generic skills and qualities, such as reflection, critical analysis, and willingness to assume responsibility for self reflect a particular cultural bias?
- What implications does this cultural bias have, given our culturally diverse student group? How do we deal with the tensions that might emerge with respect to different cultural traditions?
- Are there inherent tensions between some generic skills? One colleague commented, *There are limits to how creative students can be when writing an essay*

because there is a finite number of ways in which to approach an essay. How do we deal with these tensions, perceived or otherwise?

These and other questions and issues that emerged from our consultations with staff seem to us to offer a basis for productive discussions about pedagogy and ongoing program development. They could also be added to the list of questions and issues that need addressing more comprehensively than at present in the generic skills literature.

Strategic advantages

Finally, several staff saw strategic advantages in the curriculum mapping exercise. They argued that the willingness of staff to engage in the process reinforced the Institute's standing as a responsive and innovatory department that was prepared to support University's initiatives while reserving the right to adapt them to suit the Institute's ethos and purposes. Recognition by upper echelons of University management of our readiness and facility to respond creatively to institutional initiatives *strengthens our position within the University*, one colleague commented.

In a similar vein, staff also perceived that the curriculum mapping exercise provided an opportunity to respond proactively to the broader accountability agenda pervasive in higher education. In the words of another colleague, *it offers an opportunity to take ownership of the agenda*. This opportunity, our colleague argued, was *rich with possibilities* for shaping the ethos and direction of the program from a position of pedagogical *coherency and strength*. In other words, our colleagues were confident that they could both be seen to comply with, but at the same time transcend, the potentially instrumentalist and managerialist agenda seen by many critics to underpin the current emphasis on generic skills.

These benefits of the curriculum mapping processes in which we engaged have emerged despite the methodological limitations of our approach. In the following section, we reflect on what we have learnt from the curriculum mapping exercise. In particular, we focus on collegiality, collaborative meaning-making and curriculum mapping as a precursor to curriculum change.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT?

Our experience with the project to date has convinced us that curriculum mapping is not the straightforward, unproblematic task so often portrayed in the generic skills literature. While we have outlined some of the methodological difficulties we encountered, we suspect that we have yet to identify or fully appreciate the extent of the complexities involved. Despite these complexities, we believe that processes such as those we used in our curriculum mapping exercise appear to have the potential to make a powerful contribution to curriculum development and change. We caution, however, against the use of superficial approaches to curriculum mapping or simplistic measures advocated in some of the literature. Indeed, if the potential of curriculum mapping is to be realised, it will need to be the focus of far more extended methodological discussions.

Our experience also suggests that for curriculum mapping to be undertaken effectively, recognition of the time demands involved, and a commitment to a collegial approach will be required. We concur with Power (1994) who emphasises the importance of internally conducted reviews using qualitative and multiple methods, in a climate of facilitation, trust, autonomy, and transparency, in which collegial dialogue is valued. Power argues eloquently for the need for "greater sensitivity" (p. 45) to the potential impact of instruments and processes used in audits of any kind, including curriculum mapping for, as he points out, "the

very technologies of audit may paradoxically achieve the opposite of their intended effect" (p. 36).

For many of our colleagues, the curriculum mapping exercise initially evoked overtones of instrumentalism and managerialism, and thus was approached with some scepticism. Their response was not surprising for, as Power (1994) contends, too often such initiatives represent little more than "a series of conjuring tricks in which agencies are shuffled, new games invented, incantations recited, commissions, committees, laws, programmes and campaigns announced" (preface, citing Cohen, no date). Despite our colleagues' initial scepticism, they were prepared to suspend their concerns and to participate in the processes we have described. Their willingness and ability to do so, and our non-judgemental and consultative approach, we believe, contributed to the curriculum mapping process becoming a catalyst for reflection and collegial dialogue, rather than the unwelcome imposition and source of resentment, reported by De La Harpe et al (2000).

Further, our experience has led us to agree wholeheartedly with Power (1994) that "audits are not passive processes but strongly influence the environments in which they operate" (p. 48). We would like to think that the collegial processes we adopted not only contributed to staff engagement with the curriculum mapping exercise, but also generated excitement about the possibilities it offered to shape, as opposed to accepting, an imposed accountability agenda. This experience has reinforced for us the power of collegiality and the value of collegial dialogue in creating spaces in which to work strategically to transcend agendas that might appear more managerialist than pedagogical in intent. Such spaces provide us the freedom to envision, as a staff, possibilities for curriculum change. As Hannay and Ross (2002) argue, it is through an internally generated commitment to realising those possibilities, rather than through attempts to mandate or coerce, that deeply seated change will occur.

Our challenge now is to sustain this collegial power and dialogue as we move to subsequent stages of the project. Staff have agreed to meet with us in small groups to refine lists of descriptors added to by staff during the individual consultations. At the time of writing, these small group discussion sessions are almost complete. Like the individual consultations, they have generated a great deal of thought-provoking discussion and collaborative meaning making about what we want our teaching to achieve. Many staff have commented spontaneously on implications for their units, unit outlines, and teaching strategies, in many cases extending on ideas they had raised previously during the individual consultation phase of the curriculum mapping exercise. The teasing out and clarifying of these descriptors and what they might look like in practice have led to some shared understandings amongst staff about generic skills and qualities, and what a greater focus on generic skills and qualities might mean for our teaching and our students' experience of the program.

We wonder whether these shared understandings generated through small group discussions might assist in overcoming some of the methodological limitations we encountered when attempting to analyse quantitatively the ticks on the SLPs. If staff were to complete a revised SLP incorporating the descriptors refined during the small group sessions, might the placement of ticks then be sufficiently reliable to support a fine grained, quantitative analysis of the generic skills and qualities fostered at different stages of the program? We intend to explore this possibility in a later phase of the project.

Perhaps, in retrospect, the small group meetings to refine descriptors might have been a preferable initial step to asking staff to complete the SLP for their units(s) as a basis for individual consultations with the authors. In addition, during these meetings we may have been able to construct a joint understanding of what different degrees of complexity associated with these descriptors might look like in practice. Conceivably, we could have

also used these meetings to negotiate the column headings ('assumed' / 'encouraged' / 'modelled' and so on) in the matrix and the meaning we agreed, as a group, to assign to these headings. These strategies may have been useful in minimising the differences in interpretation and approach that limited the reliability of the placement of the ticks in the matrix, and thus the curriculum mapping exercise as a whole. Our experience with the small group meetings to date, however, leaves us in no doubt that to take on these additional tasks in the meetings in a meaningful way would have been enormously time -consuming. We are not confident that we could have prevailed on our colleagues' goodwill to this extent without creating resentment about the time demands involved and thus resistance to the project itself.

In reflecting on the sequencing of the processes we used, we sense that conducting the individual consultations prior to the small group meetings may have been instrumental in generating amongst our colleagues a personal commitment to participating in the curriculum mapping exercise. We would be interested to hear from others who have adopted similar processes concerning their thoughts about the effective sequencing of the different phases that might be involved in a curriculum mapping task.

CONCLUSION

This article represents an attempt to bridge the schism in the generic skills literature between conceptual critiques and unproblematised accounts of seemingly successful initiatives. We have focused on issues we encountered when implementing a curriculum mapping exercise using a strategy suggested in a "how to" guide. As we have discussed in this article, that strategy proved woefully inadequate for the complexity of the task. Consequently, we were less successful than we would have hoped in quantitatively mapping the fostering of generic skills and qualities within curriculum. Nevertheless, the exercise was extremely beneficial in terms of promoting reflection and dialogue amongst our colleagues about which generic skills and qualities we want to promote and how we might go about doing so. The exciting pedagogical possibilities raised during these discussions reflected our colleagues' confidence that by responding proactively to the accountability agenda, they could shape that agenda and transcend what many critics see as its managerialist focus. Clearly, there are many issues still to be addressed in relation to the current emphasis on generic skills and qualities in higher education. We contend that frank and reflective accounts of practice that do not gloss over the difficulties involved can assist this undertaking.

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